



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
MARVIN SMILON, HERBERT HADAD,
MICHAEL KULSTAD
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(914) 993-1900, (212) 637-2600
(718) 422-1870

**INTERNATIONAL ECSTASY TRAFFICKER PLEADS GUILTY TO
FEDERAL CHARGES**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, today announced that JOHAN ALFREDO BITINI, a/k/a "Tonito," pled guilty late yesterday afternoon in Manhattan federal court to an indictment charging him with importing Ecstasy from the Netherlands into the United States.

BITINI pled guilty to Counts One and Two of an Indictment that was filed on November 5, 2002. Following a six-month long wire-tap investigation, BITINI who was in Amsterdam during the time frame of the charged crimes, was ultimately arrested in the Dominican Republic and extradited to the United States. According to the charges, between May 2002 and November 2002, BITINI coordinated and shipped large quantities of Ecstasy from the Netherlands to various persons in the United States. These shipments were either brought in by human drug couriers or were concealed in cargo, including automobile parts and art work.

Prosecutors allege that in the relevant time period, BITINI was involved in the importation of between 20 and 60 kilograms of Ecstasy, with an estimated street value of \$1.5 million and \$5.8 million. Related charges against 16 other co-defendants are still pending.

BITNI faces a maximum prison term of 20 years and a fine of up to \$1 million when he is sentenced on January 24, 2004, before United States District Judge THOMAS P. GRISEA.

Mr. COMEY praised the DEA, NYPD, U.S. Customs Service, officers of the Direccion Nacional de Control de Drogas ("DNCD") in the Dominican Republic and, the Unit Synthetic Drugs in the Netherlands for their outstanding work, and important assistance in this investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys DAVID BERARDINELLI and DAVID BURNS are in charge of the prosecution.